

4 - 130

# Echo

## Councillors clash over Dale Farm 'cleansing'

9:00pm Tuesday 14th December 2010

By Jon Austin

LABOUR councillors likened the mass evictions of travellers to "ethnic cleansing" and branded the development of Dale Farm – Europe's biggest illegal camp – a "misdemeanour".

Phil Rackley refused to retract his comparison between the eviction and ethnic cleansing of minority groups during wars, despite a barrage of criticism from Tories who want the Crays Hill site cleared.

His description "this kind of ethnic cleansing" came after Basildon Labour group leader Lynda Gordon said the ten-year breach of planning laws and High Court orders by 96 families at Dale Farm was a misdemeanour, not warranting the hard line stance.

Another Labour member, Swatantra Nandanwar, said the eviction should not go ahead until alternative sites were found.

Tories warned Labour rivals they would be held responsible for violence at the eviction if they did not encourage families to leave peacefully.

Tory council leader Tony Ball said: "Will councillor Nandan-war go on the site and encourage people to leave? Will he?"

"Silence. If there is violence there will be blood on your hands."

The verbal clashes came during a heated debate updating members of the plans to clear the site by the spring.

It is estimated the eviction could cost £13million in a worst case scenario if anarchist groups such as the Wombles take part.

During the meeting there was heckling from the public gallery, local residents and traveller supporters.

Mr Rackley's comments on ethnic cleansing led to Conservative mayor Mo Larkin demanding an immediate retraction, while Tory Phil Turner called for his removal.

Tories argued the comparison was an insult to the millions murdered during the Holocaust and other genocides, and said they were simply trying to uphold planning legislation backed by the court and former Labour government.

Mr Rackley said he apologised if he caused offence, but made no retraction, adding: "The whole point is this is about removing people from their homes."

Lynda Gordon, who was accused of subscribing to anarchy, stood by her comments, arguing the £13million potential cost could not be justified against what was simply a planning breach. Both accepted their views could cost Labour votes at the next local elections, but said their principles were more important.

Geoff Williams, Lib Dem group leader, said his party believed the illegal camp should be tolerated until alternative sites could be found

© Copyright 2001-2010 Newsquest Media Group

**<http://www.echo-news.co.uk>**